

# Making Outsourcing Work in the Gaming Industry

Timbuk2 Studios turns to ConceptShare to enable lockstep collaboration and communication

The gaming industry is experiencing an explosion in the number of games created and distributed every year—especially in what are called “casual games.” These games are typically played online and are increasingly played on mobile phones, tablets, and reading devices by a growing audience of casual gamers. Leading this exploding industry are companies like Big Fish Games, which has had more than one billion games downloaded from [www.bigfishgames.com](http://www.bigfishgames.com) and distributes more than two million games per day.

But outsourcing effectively is not easy. Communication and collaboration between organizations is fraught with challenges that can create delays and affect time to market.

When Big Fish Games began a partnership with Timbuk2 Studios to develop digital artwork, the two companies knew they needed a way to efficiently collaborate, review work, and provide comments and direction. They turned to ConceptShare, which offered

*“ConceptShare gives us the ability to scale without adding extra management. We can have eight or ten people working on a project, but let ConceptShare facilitate the studio-to-artist communication and task management. ConceptShare allows us to stay lean.”*

Jon Gregerson, *Timbuk2 Studios*

## CHALLENGES: Outsourcing does not always equal savings

One of the challenges that casual gaming companies face is how to keep up with the continuous demand for new games while constantly refreshing existing games—and meet that demand in a cost-effective and profitable way. Outsourcing has emerged as a preferred model for creating everything from artwork to code, enabling companies to ramp up production and develop games at a

the review and markup tools they needed to accelerate review cycles and achieve highly effective collaboration.

Shortly after the two companies began working together, Timbuk2 Studios co-founder Jon Gregerson and Big Fish Games art director Jeff Haynie realized that their process of communicating and collaborating on visual markups and changes was not working. Says Haynie, “When we first started out, we were juggling a lot of e-mails,

## COMPANY

- » Timbuk2 Studios  
[www.timbuk2studios.com](http://www.timbuk2studios.com)
- » Big Fish Games  
[www.bigfishgames.com](http://www.bigfishgames.com)

## CHALLENGE

- » Enable a direct, efficient way for art director to provide feedback to artists in an outsourced environment
- » Provide feedback electronically that is clear and easily understood
- » Accelerate the review cycle
- » Provide a secure environment for protecting sensitive intellectual property

## SOLUTION

- » Direct communication between art director and artist without the interference and expense of a production manager
- » Markup on screen on top of assets for clear direction and feedback
- » Automatic e-mail notifications of comments and changes
- » Robust security that features bank-level encryption

## BENEFITS

- » Outsourcing that's efficient and affordable
- » Ability to scale teams to whatever size necessary for individual projects
- » Assets that are completed on time and according to specifications
- » Confidence of knowing that intellectual property is secure

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Jeff Haynie, *Big Fish Games*

conversations, and just a large amount of information—it was hard to keep track of it all.”

They learned quickly that outsourcing does not always mean cost savings. To make outsourcing profitable, game studios, such as Big Fish, need the ability to communicate directly to artists and eliminate the miscommunication and misinterpretation created by e-mail and other feedback tools traditionally used across the game industry. They need feedback tools that enable clarity and certainty—as if the artist and reviewer were working side by side in the same location. They need to accelerate review cycles to ensure assets are completed on time. And they need to be doing all of this within a secure system to ensure that intellectual property is always protected.

#### **SOLUTION: ConceptShare enables lockstep collaboration**

Timbuk2 Studios began a search for a solution that offered online review and markup tools to enable collaboration and accelerate review cycles. The company turned to ConceptShare. “We were interested in bringing more streamlined efficiency to the creative and development process, and we felt ConceptShare would provide us with the flexibility to help optimize our product lifecycle.”

ConceptShare enables creative professionals to get and give feedback on digital assets with the same degree of clarity that they could if they were in the same office—but through the convenience of a web browser and without a middle man. Reviewers can apply markups and comments directly to assets; and these comments each generate a self-contained discussion thread that allows all project stakeholders to clearly communicate and review feedback. The result: clear feedback and a streamlined and accelerated review cycle that ensures assets are delivered on time.

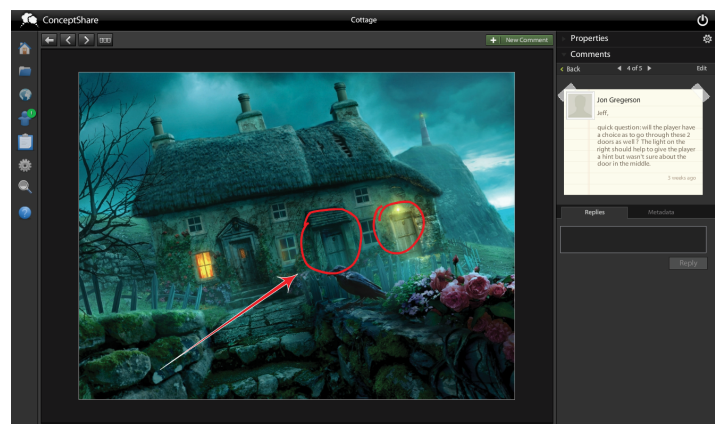
#### **Direct communication between all stakeholders**

Without ConceptShare, both Haynie and Gregerson agree that they wouldn't be able to take on the amount of work that they do. “We're a small company,” says Gregerson, “but fluctuate on a fairly extreme basis depending on the project and what team is involved. ConceptShare gives us the ability to scale without adding extra management—it allows us to stay lean. Without ConceptShare, we would have to pass on certain projects.”

Haynie agrees from the client perspective. “We have small teams. Instead of hiring more people, ConceptShare gives us the ability to work with outsourcers—and even more importantly, work with outsourcers in an efficient way. ConceptShare is a great tool. It has made us more efficient and saved us money in the long run.”

#### **Clear and actionable feedback**

ConceptShare provides the ability for Big Fish Games to give clear feedback and allows Timbuk2 Studios to work in lockstep with Big Fish Games—as a virtual member of their team. For Haynie, the commenting features—the ability to draw directly on the screen, for instance—and the ability to provide frame-by-frame feedback on video are crucial. The features enable him to provide feedback directly to the Timbuk2 artists, who in turn immediately understand what their client wants and can take action on the design direction.



*ConceptShare gives game studios an efficient way to review visual designs and provide clear and actionable art direction.*

#### **Accelerated, efficient review**

Gregerson says that the method he and Haynie used previously to manage projects often resulted in confusion and delays. All of that changed with ConceptShare. Using the application, seven to eight Timbuk2 artists collaborated with Big Fish Games on 50 complex background images for Mystery Case Files Dire Grove, including substantial feedback, comments, and interaction throughout. Both client and studio felt that without ConceptShare, the process would not have been as smooth or as fast. “ConceptShare enabled our artists to see Jeff's feedback clearly and take immediate action in response—posting new versions much more quickly,” says Gregerson.

#### **Security**

In a highly competitive industry like gaming, the ability to outsource is dependent on the presence of robust security systems, policies, and processes. ConceptShare incorporates a security model that enables companies to tightly control access to files and assets. Says Gregerson: “In the gaming industry, where intellectual property is everything, ConceptShare's security model enables clients to feel comfortable using the product.”